

## **Music and Musicians in Punjab: An Introduction to the Special Issue**

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This essay serves to frame the theme of music and musicians of Punjab and to introduce the articles in this special issue with reference to that framework. Finding the genre-based and stylistic categories of both mainstream Western and Indian discourses to be generally inadequate, the framework it suggests aims to productively place Punjabi music phenomena along such axes as gender, ethnicity, class, professionalism, and social function. The emphasis is on the local musical landscape of Punjab. Special attention is given to the agents of music, the Punjabi musicians. The essay concludes with an engagement of the contributors to the volume.

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As Guest Editor it is my pleasure to present this special issue of *Journal of Punjab Studies* on the theme of Music and Musicians of Punjab. Though its dedicated scholars are few, Punjab's music remains present, at least on the periphery, in many discussions within Punjab Studies. Indeed, in our interactions it becomes at times a common ground, like Punjabi language, food, or geography, about which we might converse with some level of familiarity. Yet this sense of familiarity, as real as it is, can also create the false assumption that we more or less understand the music. Moreover, that which occupies the "common ground" of Punjabi music among scholars, especially in the West, is that which is quite *exceptional* to Punjabi music—as it has existed historically, as it has functioned in traditional cultural spheres, and, significantly, as it is perceived by those involved with music *in Punjab*. Nonetheless many recognize, largely intuitively, that music is important for what it has to tell us about Punjabi history and culture. Indeed, the music *does* have much to say. In order to understand it, however, we require more than intuition and general cultural familiarity. We need a greater sense of the local cultural structures in which it resides along with specific details of when, where, why, and by whom it is produced and consumed. In that manner, the contributors to this volume have conducted research on very particular aspects of Punjabi music. By bringing them together for the first time, I hope the present will become a reference work, both for those

interested in knowing the lay of the land and those who would like to do new research.

This volume endeavors to re-center the focus of Punjabi music discussion through empirical and critical observation, historical situating, and locally based culture perspectives. Casual observations of any kind of music are subject to certain pitfalls. For example, in many cultural regions people are happy to ascribe great antiquity to musical practices without knowing anything about them more than that *their parents know them*. Some individuals within a nation go their lives assuming that the music in their own experience is “more or less” that of every other citizen’s experience, forgetting that people live very different lives despite the imagined sense of unity that media products may engender.

The particular case of Punjab brings its particular challenges in these regards. It is a culture where the semblance of tradition as an idea is very often made a priority, even if not reflected in actual practice. One should keep in mind, however, that not all cultural groups are so concerned with the notion of traditionality in music, or else their sense of *continuity* with the past is realized on different models. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century moment in which expression of cultural identity became so important to Punjabi music is not necessarily mirrored in other culture’s music, nor was it a great part of earlier Punjabi music. Let us not assume, therefore, that the narrative of musical development must involve the struggle to “keep alive” old practices in the face of the threatening conditions of modernity. This narrative is common in contemporary Punjabi circles for specific reasons; again, let us not confuse the *narrative* with the actual music as it has existed historically. And while mass media certainly affects the shape of music in most modern societies, the specific social conditions in Punjab have determined those media’s particular emphases.

To project our singular outsider or insider experiences of Punjabi music to extrapolate an imagined picture cannot work. That ignores the diversity of the Punjabi people and the often extremely different life experiences and cultural practices of people from different regions, classes, and castes. Indeed, one could also say that, in traditional cultural spheres especially, women’s experiences of music are vastly different from those of men. This sort of variety of musical experience is, arguably, minimized in global Punjabi culture. “Bhangra” has been both a boon and a burden. Global Punjabi popular music has raised the profile of Punjabis and provided a cultural reference point. Yet it has sidelined, at least in our discourse, much of what was and is part of the world of Punjabi music and musicians.

While this volume does not purport to cover the entire field of Punjabi music—an impossible task—it does aim to supply a more balanced coverage than has heretofore been presented. This has meant the presentation of some subjects that are rarely discussed, many of

which may be unfamiliar or unknown even to scholars in Punjab Studies. Given the feeling for a need for re-centering expressed above, the focus here is on Punjab. The vast majority of scholarly output on Punjabi music that reaches the West thus far has been concerned with commercial recordings, reading them as texts. The music in those discussions is primarily located in the Diaspora, or else among globetrotters who happen to be in Punjab. So far as this *is* the music of a large number of people and presents both interesting and relevant issues of study, the validity of such research cannot be in doubt. We may distinguish, however, that area of music from that which is fairly particular to the Punjab region and which is, more importantly, embedded in that cultural system. This is not to suggest that Punjabi culture is limited by geography, nor is it intended to essentialize or compartmentalize any cultural group. It is a practical, not an absolute, distinction, for the purpose of focusing study at this particular moment in the development of the field.

Though global Punjabi popular music is related to Punjabi people, for the most part it sits within a Western cultural structure. As such, scholars' discussions of it, while acknowledging the details of Punjabi history that may be relevant, tend to be based in the same Western cultural perspective that is used to approach popular music from nearabout anywhere. (Consider, too, the potential difference between sound recordings and *music*.) By contrast the selection of articles for this volume starts from my assumption (not necessarily shared by the contributors) that there is a reasonably unique area of "Music of Punjab," consisting of music bound up in a particular cultural complex. Indeed, ethnomusicologists like myself study music, in part, in hopes to reveal such cultural complexes. In order to shed light on Punjabi culture specifically (i.e. apart from general theoretical topics it may touch upon like capitalism, nationalism, identity, or gender), one must investigate Punjabi music within that type of framework.

The scope of the articles has been set with a few other principles in mind. First, for the reasons already stated, although Diaspora Punjabi music is a fascinating area of study, I have chosen to exclude it in order to reinforce the discussion of music of Punjab itself. Second, I acknowledge that music and *dance* are two related areas of performance in Punjab, and that drawing a line between them is not always helpful. However, in this case, too, I have excluded articles focused on dance in order to give attention to music that is not well known. Despite that, I have left the definition of "music" as something rather broad, to include, but not to focus on, dance, drama, and other types of performance. Third, there is no deliberate focus on "folk" music here. However, popular and "classical" music subjects have received less coverage, despite keen interest, because of lack of available writers to cover those subjects in an

original way and with detailed emphasis on the local Punjabi culture. Fourth and most notably, in accordance with my proposed framework of Punjabi music-culture, I have hoped to emphasize not the audience, but rather the musicians or performers. Too often has Punjabi music been discussed as if the performers were anonymous, idealized agents of Punjabi culture, or else from the perspective of a generic audience that receives music which is presumed to be a representation of themselves.

I acknowledge that the last emphasis, on the individual agency of the musicians, may appear to have political undertones, however, I do not intend it as such. The fact is that Punjabi music has been created, by and large, by members of the so-called “service” class of society. From the perspective of those whom they serve, the “patron” class, the actions of these performers are not so important. They, the patrons, are the “important” ones, *for whom* things are done. This class most influences how discussions of music are approached, as they also make up the dominant voice in the global sphere where such discussions take place. Thus the emphasis has been on the music, as it is received, not on the musicians. Yet any performing musician, as myself, can tell you that we show the audience just *what we want to*. The performer knows he must consider what the audience *thinks* they want, and though he may give that, he remains conscious of the gesture, and the potential difference from his own preferences. It is the performer who controls the show, no matter how much the audience may feel satisfied that they have elicited a performance according to their standards. In focusing on the performers then, we bring attention to the personal and practical dimensions of the music that I feel have been missing from the interpretive writings on the subject.

The contributors to this volume are among the leading scholars in their fields. That being said, not all are aware of each other’s works or have had the opportunity to read them. There are two major issues of note. The first is that research on the subject of Punjabi music has yet to form a solid base. There is a long incubation period in any new scholarship, and the work done by individuals like Inderjit N. Kaur, Lowell Lybarger, and Neelam Man Singh Chowdry, though it has been many years in the making, has not yet appeared in widely available books. As for the senior scholars, their work is subject to the second issue that their work is not in English and in part because of this it has been relegated to a small circle of readers. In general, one rarely sees references to Punjabi-language authors’ work in English texts and vice versa. The International Conference on Punjabi Culture that was held in May 2004 at the University of California, Santa Barbara, was one exceptional event where scholars from different nations were brought together. One result of that was an issue of *Journal of Punjab Studies* (vol. 11:2, 2004) containing introductory articles on the various cultural

topics by both Punjab-based and Western-based scholars. The present volume continues that effort, but with a specific focus on music. In order to introduce the works of the non-English writers to the wider readership, portions of their work—subjects that have not been discussed elsewhere—are presented in translation. My hope is that all the authors herein will receive wider readership and recognition for their contributions to this growing field.

### **Music in Punjab**

While “music” is often discussed in an abstract sense in contemporary Punjab, for the purpose of really understanding its role in Punjabi culture this approach is unproductive. The idea of a generic “Punjabi music” is largely the result of the mediation of traditions in the commercial industry format, by the agents of “culture promotion,” and through other such modern channels. In reality, what one might approach from the outside under the rubric of “music” consists of numerous and not necessarily related practices, circumscribed more tightly by prescriptive cultural norms than what qualifies as “music” in the West. “Music” unqualified cannot adequately describe these practices from the Punjabi cultural perspective. Specific labels that parallel music’s divisions elsewhere are also confusing. Note for example the use of the inadequate phrase “folk music,” which best applies to a notion imported from the West—albeit with locally acquired nuances—that does not make a significant appearance in Punjabi discourse before the 1950s. Such terms, because they are culturally specific and do not translate well across cultures, are best limited to conversational use. The effort here, then, is to encourage concrete discussion, using labels that can accommodate native criteria.

One thing that characterizes music-making in Punjabi society, and which distinguishes it (in degree, but not necessarily in kind) from music-making in modern Western societies, is that it is an especially *marked* activity. To understand what is meant by “marked,” one could draw the analogy to a familiar marked activity in most societies, sex, whereby variations in such variables as gender, money, relationship, privacy, and religion all have the potential to drastically affect how the same act is perceived. Likewise the act of performance (read, *music*) in Punjabi society gets construed and compartmentalized by established norms.

In an effort to understand Punjabi music independently from genre labels, I propose we distinguish multiple spheres or “worlds” of *performance*.<sup>1</sup> This structure puts musicians and social contexts at the center of the classification. Labels like “folk,” “classical,” and “pop” are often based on perceptions of where a piece of music belongs in certain

bodies of repertoire, along with their performance style. The connotations associated with these labels do include ideas about what sort of people perform them and when/where they might be performed. However, those ideas are conflated with other, subjective perceptions. If, for example, we have a women's wedding song, what do we do with it when it is performed by a classically-trained male professional musician in a concert at a folklore museum, or when it is recorded on CD, with a synthesizer accompaniment, and danced to at a party in London? It becomes quite unhelpful to treat the piece as a "folk-song" just because its text and tune may ultimately derive from a traditional amateur composition or the actors in the music video are dressed in old-fashioned costumes. This is why I start with the performers as the basis of classification. Who are the performers? What is their intent? For what purpose do they provide the music? How does the audience relate to them and by what mode do they receive the music from them?

One finds that performance within each world is subject to certain implied social restrictions, as indeed these restrictions are what maintain the boundaries between them. Thus each world operates relatively separately from the others. There is nothing absolute about the boundaries that separate these worlds, nonetheless the sense of boundary can be perceived in the tensions that manifest in their transgressions. One can identify the different worlds of performance in Punjab in terms of the musical act's nature and function. Each is further marked by commonalities in such features as who performs and why they perform, as articulated by such dimensions as gender, professionalism, and ethnicity. In the following sections, I identify each of these worlds of performance.

### *The Amateur World*

Performance in this world is done by people who are not culturally considered to be "performers." What they do is either considered to be a ritual act or else one "of no great consequence," similar to speaking. This is not "music" in the local sense. The vast majority of this activity comes under the rubric of "singing" and goes by the respective names of specific genres. It is first and foremost a recitation of texts.<sup>2</sup> The repertoire of so-called "folk-song" (*lokgīt*), according to *strict* application of the term (as by Nahar Singh; see below), fits most precisely into this world. The playing of instruments here is limited to a few that are coded as domestic implements or as exceedingly amateur in their associations. Women are the main performers in this world. Most of their performances coincide with ritual occasions, and they often mark stages in a ceremony. Most importantly, this type of performance is for oneself and the immediate community in which one resides; no external

“audience” is addressed. It is of a participatory nature and the performers are not formally trained. An important distinction of this world is that performance is not done *for* payment. A seeming exception to that might be when a professional such as a *Mirāsaṅ* intercedes to provide guidance to the amateur performers and is compensated for the service. Although specific ethnic groups may have their particular practices, in the Amateur World, participation is not *limited* by ethnicity.

#### *The Professional World*

In this world, performance is exclusionary, that is, it is marked by a sharp division between a discreet audience and the performers. The latter are professionals, which means first and foremost that they do the act for money (on which they depend for a living). Performance is considered to be a service for others, so the performers have the generally low social status of service-providers. Accordingly, they ideally belong to specific families, micro-ethnic communities, by which they gain their hereditary birthright to a monopoly on this type of performance. Individuals outside of this world of performance, according to traditional rules of propriety, are discouraged from performing its repertoire. The repertoire includes, along with more difficult texts, “music” proper—*sangīt*. Along with music go instruments, the tools of the trade of these performing professionals. In order to perform such difficult repertoire and on professional instruments, the performers are highly trained. In contrast to the Amateur World, this world is dominated by men. Some women perform, but under certain conditions of exception or under penalty of social transgression.

#### *The Sacred World*

The Amateur World and the Professional World reflect customary distinctions of pre-industrial Punjab. The Sacred World is another, which sometimes shares qualities of each of the foregoing and is, in a way, an alternative to them. It seems that the spiritual nature and *devotional intent* of this type of performance allow for the transgression of otherwise standing norms. Just as rhythm ‘n’ blues and gospel songs may be nearly the same except for the stated motive of their performance, performances in the Sacred World of Punjabi culture may resemble other types of performance musically while allowing for very different standards of participation, professionalism, and context. While the Amateur performers perform for themselves and their community, and the Professional performers perform for an outside audience, Sacred performers perform, on anyone’s behalf, for the Divinity.

Similarly, if the Amateur World corresponds roughly to “song,” and performances in the Professional World are “music,” then performance in the Sacred World is “devotion.” That the latter is not “music,” or that it is a sort of “music plus” allows the negation of the usual norms of *who* performs. This is because, as per cultural “policy” on devotion—sentiments common to Sufism, Sikhi, and devotional Hinduism—participation in such performance cannot be limited by gender, class, or ethnicity. For example, in the secular genre of *dhāḍī* performance, performance has been limited to men, but in the devotional (Sikh) genre, it is common nowadays to see groups containing all females. Indeed, rarely would you see, in conservative circles, women performing ballads whilst playing instruments on stage, but the religion-based intent of female dhadis “allows” for it. Participants in the Sacred World will have different levels of training, those being formally trained often serving as leaders on behalf of the untrained participants. Historically many of the trained performers in the Sacred World have corresponded to those in the Professional World, however this world of performance has also been open to those would-be performers that are excluded from the latter. A common way in which non-hereditary performers (i.e. those not from ascribed ethnic communities) have gained the “right” to perform is through presenting themselves devotionally. Thus “faqirs” of all sorts, individuals who have practically renounced their caste-based social status, have historically numbered among performers. While performers may earn money, because of the intent of their service, this does not reflect negatively on their social status.

#### *The Mediated World*

This is the product of modern life in Punjab, which can be understood to post-date the phenomenon of Punjabi music as characterized by the previously described worlds. Prior to the advent of a music industry in Punjab, the layperson had a rather limited involvement in the production of music and was also limited as to when he or she could *hear* music. This situation changed dramatically with the emergence of the most pervasive world of performance in contemporary Punjab, the Mediated World. It is characterized most significantly by mass mediation and its potential for separating a performance from an immediate context and performers from audience. The fluidity of recordings and broadcasts in crossing cultural boundaries upsets the traditional norms of performance practices. So while *repertoire* deriving from earlier worlds of performance may be performed in the Mediated World, it functions very differently there.

Commercial recordings dissolve or upset certain barriers between the conventional worlds of music-making. On one hand, the venture is



commercial—a trait of the Professional World that was closely linked to its strictures on ethnicity, class, and gender. On the other hand, the faceless, potential anonymity of the sound recording medium allows for subversion of norms of who may perform for entertainment and what one's pedigree must be. Indeed, while in the past each world of music-making had functioned to suit some aspect of Punjabi social life, products of the music industry appear as rather awkward specimens when approached from the traditionalist perspective. They bring with them the notion of experiencing music without any explicit performance context.

### **Professional Musicians and Performer Communities**

One can categorize Punjabi musicians in several ways. One of the obvious ways that people might be inclined to do so is according to the musical genre the musicians play. However, a deficiency in that approach is equally obvious: What does one do when a musician plays more than one genre? Each approach has its shortcomings, however I believe categorization according to ethnic groups to be the most productive (that is, productive in revealing rather than concealing cultural structures) and “neatest” (“neat” with respect to an elegant classification scheme). Nevertheless, no single scheme can cover the whole, and the ethnicity-based categories should be combined with other ways of looking at the subject, depending on context and one's interest. Furthermore, in grouping people the intent is not to remove their individual agency. Rather, it is to emphasize the groups' actions in an environment where they have been going unrecognized. With these disclaimers in place, I introduce the idea of ethnicity-based musician classification, along with the main ethnic communities that make it up.

As explained above, all Punjabi communities make music in the Amateur World of performance, as indeed the music (broadly conceived) is more or less participatory and for one's peers. However, these people are not “musicians” *per se*. The *professional* performance of music—that which is exclusionary, specialized, and/or for profit—has customarily been associated with or confined to particular communities that cohere according to one or another ethnic (caste/tribe/clan) identity. I call these “performer communities.” Some of these communities are associated *primarily* with music, while others are those in which music performance *may* occur, but it does not have a strong bearing on the group's identity as such. These communities stand in contrast to those who implicitly or explicitly reject public performance as a viable or socially appropriate behavior for their members.

The vast majority of professional musicians belong to the Scheduled Castes—indeed, they are among the most marginalized of them—or to the bureaucratic category of Backwards Castes. The general principal is

that, regardless of the high degree of respect individual musicians may garner, the communities from which they come are overwhelmingly those to whom society has given the lowest status. The question of the reason for an apparent correlation between being a musician and being of low social status in South Asia (and beyond) is one of general philosophical interest that cannot be answered here.

Although individuals from the three major religious faiths do perform music professionally, relatively very few Sikhs (the majority religious community in the Indian state) perform music as an occupation. This activity largely consists of serving as sacred-musicians (*rāgīs*) in gurdwaras or, more recently, as singers in the popular music industry. According to my theory of worlds of performance, these “exceptions” can be explained by the devotional intent of the first context and the mediated and modern mode of the second. The real explanation of the statistical fact of few Sikh professional musicians is that fewer Sikhs belong to the low-status performer communities from which the musicians historically and customarily come.

In all, one will find the communities to which professional musicians belong to be the least well known, whether in popular imagination or scholarly writing. The following briefly introduces several of these performer communities. The bias is towards groups in the India Punjab, as those are the ones among whom I have done the most ethnographic work.

### *Dūm*

*Dom* is a widely distributed ethnic term in South Asia. The Dom are not a caste, rather, their historical presence suggests they once constituted a large scale tribe or what one might conversationally call a “race.” Specific reference to the Dom people occurs by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE (Ghurye 1969:313).<sup>3</sup> Persian scholar al-Biruni (early 11<sup>th</sup> century) noted that the Dom were among those peoples located outside of and ranked beneath the four main classes of Indian society. Their occupation was to sing and play a lute (1919:101-2). Al-Biruni’s contemporary writer, Gardizi, mentioned a class of people called “Dunbi,” most likely the Dom.<sup>4</sup> They were described in his writing as “black-skinned” “players on stringed instruments and dancers” who occupied an untouchable class of society (Minorsky 1964:202-3). Throughout South Asia the Dom practice such professions as scavenger, executioner, basket-maker, musician, blacksmith, leatherworker, weaver—in short, occupations considered menial. One might speculate that the bulk of the castes that have been considered untouchable had their origin in some larger Dom base. In any case, the Dom are of nearly universal low social status.

One of the Punjabi branches of the Dom, locally called *Ḍūm*, constitute a fairly distinct group from the larger “race” as known in the rest of South Asia. The people best known as Dum in Punjab are hereditary musicians, bards, or genealogists. In fact, though the phenomenon of Dom people as musicians is widespread, it may have its *origins* in the greater Punjab region (see Schreffler 2010:105). Importantly, the idea of Dom as a large-scale people or tribe engaged in many occupations underscores the fact that the occupation of musician overlaps with other occupations and duties, such as tailor, barber, circumciser, and basket-maker. The Dum of the greater Punjab area were Jacks of several trades. Compare for example the role of the Dum in Pathan society, which extended to many rituals. During wedding rites of the Khaṭṭak Pathans of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dums acted as go-betweens or assistants. Rose recorded that when the bride was taken to her husband’s home, a Dum rode along on the pony with her (1911:531), saying that “The ḍūm is throughout an important person and is fed on all occasions” (ibid.:532).

The descendants of the Dum, spread among several subcastes, make up an important community in Punjab. However, people are fairly unaware of them, in part due to the fact that the over-broad (and often regarded as pejorative) term “Dum” is rarely *used*. Musicians that appear to be from the larger Dum stock are currently divided among at least three separate communities: *Jogī*, *Mahāshā*, and *Mirāsī*.

### *Jogī*

The *Jogī* may be the closest “equivalent,” in the contemporary Punjab, to the erstwhile Dum. They are a Hindu community with origins in the North-Central Punjab and the surrounding hills; Sialkot and Jammu are centers of diffusion. They have long been known as “gurus,” both in musical arts *and* religious life.

The reason for their group name “Jogi” is unclear. One thing certain is that it designates an endogamous ethnic community, not a haphazard conglomeration of ascetics. However, in a time where music performance was more restricted to certain segments of society, faqirs or jogis—in the broad sense—were indeed associated with ballad-singing and playing of the *tūmbā* (gourd lute). Similarly, members from the Jogi community of Punjab tell how their ancestors were once expert at singing ballads (*kathā*). These people were based in the hill regions on the Northern side of Punjab, popularly conceived as the “abode of the Gods.” The hills are rich in powerful Hindu sites (e.g. Vaishno Devi temple near Jammu), and the Dum there had been facilitators to rituals at temples and at homes. In this way we might understand the transformation of part of the Dum community into “Jogi” due to the image suggested by their

activities. Moreover, “jogi” would have been a more respectful term than one with the low-status connotations of “Dum.”



Fig. 1. Ustad Bal Kishan with dhol outside his office in Jammu Cantonment, 2005. Photo: G. Schreffler.

Bal Kishan of Jammu tells how his people used to sing and play all sorts of instruments. His own skills extend from *dhol* (large barrel drum) to *tablā* and *pakhāvaj* (cylindrical) drums, along with the double-reed aerophone *bīn*. Interestingly, in our conversations, he never used the word “Jogi.” Instead he referred to his people as *ustād lok* or *gurū lok* (“teacher-people”), reinforcing the inadequacy of both the euphemistic “Jogi” and the vulgar “Dum.”

From Jammu, the Jogi have filtered down into Punjab’s nearby district of Gurdaspur. One of the largest communities of dhol-players to serve the East Punjab is located in Ludhiana city, and they are largely of Jogi background. Jogis also have a presence in Ambala.

#### *Mahāshā*

Another section of the Dum community has become known as *Mahāshā*. They are an urban community that originated in places around Lahore and Sialkot. The late 19<sup>th</sup> century Arya Samaj movement had provided an

opportunity to change the Dum's low status with their offer to reincorporate outcastes back into the "Hindu" fold. Individuals from the Dum community availed of this opportunity in great numbers, whereby they were dubbed the newly coined term, "Mahasha" (Singh 1998:510). Along with this rebirth many Dum gave up their stigmatizing professions of cane-work and scavenging in further effort to erase the memory of their previous status. Having abandoned service trades, one of the main "clean" occupations that the Mahasha turned to was business. They did not abandon music, however.



Fig. 2. Ustad Tilak Raj, with his wife, at his office in Amritsar, 2005. Photo: G. Schreffler.

One of the largest and oldest-established dhol-playing communities in East Punjab is the Mahasha community in Amritsar. Its shining stars are some of the most celebrated ustads of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, they are also a downtrodden community. Their historic neighborhood is located near Sultanwind Gate, not far from the Darbar Sahib. Inside the gate is a long *galī*, Dholi Muhalla, a huge market for musicians through which one can stroll and find someone for any event. One of the actively playing leaders of the Amritsar Dholi Muhalla is Tilak Raj. His relatives make ends meet in a variety of ways, in which one can still see the old

profession of cane-work. For example, Tilak Raj's father, retired *ḍholī* (dhol-player) Mela Ram, works with his wife splitting bamboo and making hoops, to be used to make drumheads.

After Amritsar the next largest Mahasha musician community is found in Jalandhar, where many of the families had come from Sialkot. Most have brought with them the brass band tradition; twenty bands in Jalandhar city, especially found in the Purani Kot Bazar area, go by the name of "Sialkoti Band."

### *Mirāsī*

Despite the many different ethnic groups that perform in some way, the occupation of professional musician in North India has been, since medieval times, closely associated with people called *Mirāsī* (*Marāsī*, *Mirāsī*). "Mirasi" is perhaps most accurately characterized as an occupational label. At the same time, however, it has been used with the intent of identifying one or more ethnic groups that, if not having emerged from a common stock, have at least *cohered* through in-group marriage practices. A clearer explanation might be to say that, for the ethnic groups to which the term is most often applied, "Mirasi" is little more than an occupational label. The people who constitute the ethnic communities from which these performers come may accept or reject the Mirasi label if and when it suits them, while maintaining a more accurate, insider's sense of who their people are. For outsiders to the community, the term is both an (overused) occupational label *and* an ethnic label. We may attempt to understand it from both inside and outside perspectives.

The term "Mirasi" probably comes from the Arabic *mīrāth*, "inheritance," but it is not self-evident in what sense "inheritance" should be interpreted. It may refer specifically to the role of Mirasis as personal bards and genealogists. Some Mirasis have been charged with preserving the genealogies and historical events of specific clans, which they may recite on occasions such as the birth of a son, a wedding, or a funeral. In this respect, in medieval and colonial times they served a function analogous to the *griot* in West Africa, or the piper and harpist to Scottish clans. The linguistic root of "inheritance" may have had a more generic interpretation, referring to the *hereditary* nature of their profession. I believe this interpretation to be more accurate since Mirasi occupations are not limited to genealogist. Moreover, in practice the label of Mirasi is used to denote, first and foremost, a *hereditary* professional musician. Indeed, the catch-all term encompasses many types of musicians, and so they are often known by more occupation-specific names that indicate their function or the instrument they play, such as Qawwal (a Sufi devotional singer) or Nagarchi (a player of kettledrum, *nagārah*). The hereditary nature of these occupations is, arguably, what binds them.

Whereas all Mirasi are more or less presumed to be professional musicians, not all professional musicians are Mirasi. So despite the general occupational nature of the term, it also has an ethnic dimension. There is evidence that the Mirasi communities—they are perhaps best thought of in the plural—emerged from within another heterogeneous group, the Dum. Not only were the professions of Dum and Mirasi identical in past accounts, the terms have also been treated as synonymous, even up to the present day where the hyphenated label “Dum-Mirasi” is sometimes still used. Guru Nanak’s minstrel, Bhai Mardana, is said to have been a Mirasi according to Bhai Gurdas (early 17<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>5</sup> Brothers Satta and Rai Balvand, who worked as minstrels in the courts of Guru Nanak’s successors, were said to have come from the Dum community (Nabha 1930:561; *Guru Granth Sahib* pg. 966). Contemporary Mirasis connect their lineage to these individuals. Such references, however, do not eliminate the possibility that outsiders, in their usage of the terms, have conflated occupation and ethnicity. Nonetheless, the great amount of such references, and the strong correlation between the social roles of Dum and Mirasi suggest a working consensus that at least part of the community of ethnic Mirasis descended from Dums.

Another factor that distinguishes the Mirasi as a potentially distinct ethnic community is that they are Muslims. A rather likely scenario is that they were converts to Islam from among Hindus like the Dum who, upon conversion, kept their profession, but adopted a new identity and kinship practices on religious grounds. This new identity, replete with a more “noble” name, gave the potential for a better social status than the Dum, with whom the Mirasi subsequently avoided associating. The newly christened Mirasi would now look down on the Dum (an idea put out by Rose 1914:107). Confirming this scenario is complicated because it is difficult to say if, historically speaking, the generic term “Mirasi” was *only* used in the case of a Muslim who performs the same work as his Hindu counterpart, or if it was sometimes used occupationally regardless of the referent’s religious background. A few references do raise the possibility of a Hindu Mirasi community. Thind states that one division of the Mirasi in India consists of itinerant ten-dwellers, that these are the descendants of the Dom, and that they call themselves Hindu. He states that by contrast the settled Mirasis who participate in the patron-client system are all Muslim (1996:39-40). K.S. Singh also states that there are both Muslim and Hindu Mirasis (1998:2299). It may be that the so-called Mirasis of Hindu faith are so little known—or known better as “Dum”—such that the *best-known* “Mirasis” have become thought of as exclusively Muslim. Interestingly, some of the older Indian musicians with whom I have spoken were able to avoid a Mirasi/Dum or Hindu/Muslim dichotomy by simply referring to *ustād*

*lok*—i.e. those people who are traditionally recognized as knowledgeable about music.

So much for an etic attempt to define Mirasi; how do they explain themselves? As might be expected, the generic, lumping term “Mirasi,” although handy for outsiders, is less useful for these individuals when labeling themselves. In fact, the name “Mirasi” has acquired some connotations of greater or milder contempt, especially in Pakistan. Some Mirasis in West Punjab call themselves *Kasbī*, Persian for “one who works” (Nayyar 2000:763). Others generally prefer the fancy label *Mīr ‘ālam* (“lord of the world”), and to be addressed as *mīr* (“chief”).

There may be as many divisions to the Mirasi “community” as there are writers to name them. Lybarger (this volume) has analyzed the major classificatory schemes in print, and developed his own empirically-based model. The exploration of these divisions is enlightening, and makes it clear that there is considerably variation according to time period and geographic region. At this point we have yet to amass enough ethnographic information for a comprehensive study of the Mirasi, and with that in mind, information from various quarters is welcome. To that end, I contribute my own findings on Mirasis in the Malerkotla area, following.

Contemporary Mirasis (i.e. in the Malerkotla area, districts Ludhiana and Sangrur) distinguished three major groups within a larger “Mirasi” community. Marital relations are forbidden between these groups, which suggests that the notion of a larger community is the outsider’s abstraction—albeit an abstraction of which the insiders are aware. The first group is the *Mardānā*, who serve the Jatt and other land-owning communities. Their name is an obvious reference to Bhai Mardana (1516-1591), the Muslim minstrel who accompanied Guru Nanak on the *rabāb*, a plucked lute of the northwestern areas. One informant from this community asserted that Bhai Mardana’s actual name was actually parsed as “Mīr Dānā,” and that the proper name for his community was *Rabābī* (Sher Khan, personal communication, 14 May 2005). In any case, the Mardana Mirasi are proud to be associated with the Sikh tradition, with which they are intimately familiar. The Mardana had historically been singers and players of the rabab and sarangi. Informants spoke of them as if they were the “default” or “real” Mirasi. Indeed, they regard themselves as superior to other Mirasi groups. Their claims to high status, at least in the current environment, are bolstered by their supposed historical connection to Bhai Mardana and their contemporary connection to landed Sikhs.

Another Mirasi group in the area is the *Bhandī*, who serve the Valmiki (Balmiki) and Mazhbi communities. K.S. Singh calls them “Balmiki Mirasi” (1998:2299). They specialize in a slapstick, Abbot and Costello-like comedy act. The usual performance format consists of a



“straight man” that receives wacky retorts to his questions, which he puts to a “funny man.” The performers dress in ridiculous exaggeration of “low-class” or “bumpkin” attire. Whenever the funny man makes a clownish remark, the straight man slaps the other’s hand with a piece of rolled-up leather (*chamoṭā*). The sound of this constant slapping—the “slapstick” as it were—gives a sort of rhythm to the routine. In the traditional context, such duos or trios entertain at childbirth and wedding celebrations. In the *Ā’in-i Akbarī* (late 16<sup>th</sup> century), the Bhand were noted for playing the *duhul* (a progenitor of the dhol or dholak) and cymbals (Abu l-Fazl 1948:272). One must be clear that although the “Bhand” label corresponds to a certain occupation or performance style, it is indeed being used by contemporary Mirasis to distinguish an ethnic group.

A third group of Mirasis consists of performers known as *Naqqālī* or *Naqqāl*. Their performances are more elaborate than those of the Bhand. They consist of a family-based troupe of performers, including dramatists, comedians, singers, instrumentalists, and at least one female impersonator. Their art is called *naqal*—“imitation” or “mimicry”—and is in essence a variety show of skits, songs, and dances. The basis of the performance may be the dramatization of one of the traditional tales, but the presentation is far from straightforward. At one moment the show may break for comedy of the Bhand type. At another it may feature dancing by the female impersonators, in a *kathak*-based style, to light classical-type music. Other interludes consist of *qawwālī* songs by a group. Indeed, with decline in popularity of their characteristic entertainment genre, many Naqqalias have shifted focus to qawwali singing (Singh 1998:2587). The terms Bhand and Naqqalia are often said to be synonymous (ibid.; Nayyar 2000:765; Rose 1914:156), probably due to their overlapping professions. However, regardless of their possibly conflated status in the past, contemporary “Mirasis” in East Punjab distinguish these as two groups.

Mirasis can be found as players on just about any instrument and as singers of any entertainment genre of song. Whatever performance skill they practice, they are usually subject to the most rigorous of training. Mirasis have been major players in the development of Hindustani classical music, especially as instrumentalists on the sarangi and tabla. Neuman finds that by around the 1870s, the Mirasi had begun to take the place of an earlier historically-mentioned performer community, the *Dhādī*, in the capacity of court musicians (Neuman 1980:130) who had been established in that role since at least Akbar’s time—or else the names of the musicians changed!

As paid praise-singers, Mirasis were expected to extol the virtues of an individual’s family line. As possessors of a family’s historical information, they had the power to present that history as less than

favorable if they were not duly compensated. The practice was recorded in colonial times whereby if a Mirasi was not given something for his performance, he would construct a cloth effigy of his non-patron, attach it atop a pole, and parade it through the village (Rose 1914:109). Being strictly professionals, their attitude towards payment verges on one of entitlement.

Women from the Mirasi communities, called *Mirāsaṇ* (sng.), are distinguished as professionals in their own right. They perform as singers at various life-cycle events. So for instance, on the sixth day of a boy child's life or some convenient time within the year thereafter, a ritual called *chhaṭī* is performed. The Mirasan, playing the small barrel drum *ḍholkī*, leads in singing wedding-type songs and dancing (N. Kaur 1999:32). One of the most important functions of the Mirasan is to lead the women's songs (*alāhuṇīānī*) of group mourning that follow a person's death. Mirasans have also been alleged to perform "exorcisms" in the past (Rose 1919:203).

Both women and men of the Mirasi, like the Dum of neighboring regions, used to perform the function of intermediary for their patrons. Known as a *lāgī*, after the customary dues (*lāg*) to which he or she is entitled for his services, the traditional intermediary in life-cycle rituals was usually a priest, a barber, or a Mirasi. In a wedding, for instance, the *lāgī* would hand the *shagan* (monetary donations) to the groom. At the time of each of these small services, the *lāgī* received a small amount of cash. Of course, Mirasis were also expected to entertain, and they did so for the male guests of both the bride and groom's houses from the day before a wedding (Eglar 1960:167-8).

Being a Muslim community, most Mirasis left East Punjab at Partition. Some stayed behind and remained attached to their substantial patrons. They are most densely populated in the districts of Ludhiana, Sangrur, and Patiala. These are the areas closest to the princely states that remained autonomous after 1947. More significantly, they are close to the town of Malerkotla, which is best known as one of the only towns in Punjab to have a majority Muslim population (Bigelow 2005:74). During the tumult of Partition, local Muslims were given refuge within the walls of the city. This historical event was important in shaping the modern makeup of musicians in East Punjab.

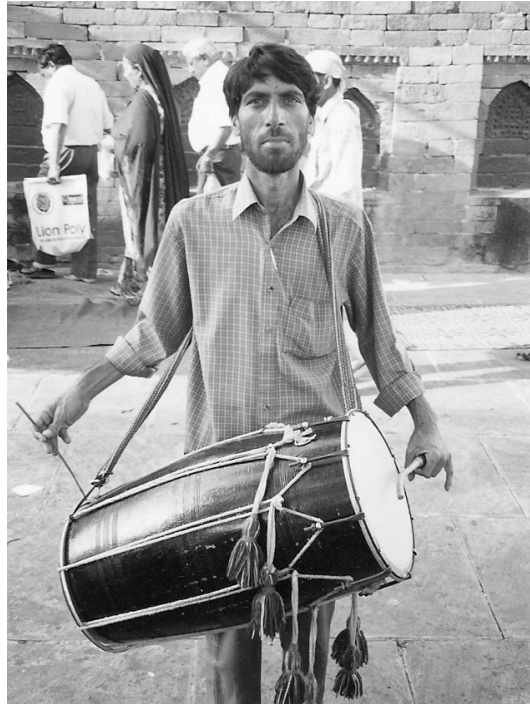


Fig. 3. A Mirasi-Naqqalia dholi, the son of Sadhu Khan of Malerkotla, 2005. Photo: G. Schreffler.

A variety of Mirasi musicians are regulars at the shrine of the saint Hazrat Haider Shaikh in Malerkotla. For instance there is the son of Sadhu Khan, who is leader of a Naqqalia party. His family belongs to the Patiala vocal gharana of Barkat Ali. In the same family are Mirasi dhol-players Zilfaqr Ali and Liaqat Ali, who earn tips playing at the shrine on Thursdays. In addition to also playing tabla and various instruments in a wedding band, they sing qawwali at shrines.

Another, village-based, Mirasi family is represented by Master Sher Khan of Jarg (dist. Ludhiana), who belongs to the Mardana group. One of Sher Khan's "brothers" is the famous singer and recording artist, Mohammed Siddiq. Within the village, the family enjoys a respected status; their house, while very modest, is located among the homes of landowner families. Khan and his sons are also officiants and caretakers in charge of a local shrine to Baba Farid. They have three horses that they keep for wedding rentals and their own personal enjoyment. Professionally, they are experts in many types of music. Sher Khan started a brass band tradition; he plays clarinet and saxophone for the band, now led by his son. All the family members are adept at singing

and playing the harmonium, and all of the men in can play dhol to some degree.

### *Dhādī*

The term *Dhādī*, like “Mirasi,” is ambiguous as an ethnic category because it also quite plainly refers to a musician that performs the *dhādī* music genre, irrespective of his background. To what degree *dhādī* had historically specified a distinct lineage, versus a general term for a musician or, more specifically, a musician type (e.g. bard) similarly lacks clarity. So when in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century Guru Nanak metaphorically likened himself to a “*dhādī*,” we understand that he means a bard, and that such bards belong to a menial class, but we do not know whether this was a singular ethnic community. Akbar’s court in the middle of that century employed both males and females of the “*Dhādī*” community. The men were said to recite primarily heroic verse, playing on the hourglass drum *dhadd* and the plucked lute *kingar* (Abu l-Fazl 1948:271). Qawwali singers were ascribed to the Dhadhi community as well (ibid.). As for the women,

The *Dhādī* women chiefly play on the *Daf* and the *Duhul*, and sing the *Dhurpad* and the *Sohlā* on occasions of nuptial and birthday festivities in a very accomplished manner. (Abu l-Fazl 1948[ca.1590]:271-2)

The *Ā’in-i Akbarī* also includes the names of several musicians who have “*Dhādī*” appended to their names (Abu l-Fazl 1927:681-2).

Since at least the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Dhadi of Punjab have been associated with a specific repertoire that includes martial ballads and often-unique versions of traditional tales. Their performances, executed standing, include the characteristic instruments *sārangī* (a bowed lute with sympathetic strings) and *dhadd* (small, hand-struck hourglass drum). The best-known performers called dhadi nowadays perform ballads about the Sikh tradition, however this perception is largely the result a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon. As Nijhawan illustrates, Sikh performers from non-hereditary background, exemplified by Sohan Singh Seetal, adopted the dhadi genre as a form of “public participation” in which one could voice political and religious ideas in the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. In doing so, they were inclined to disassociate with some aspects of the perceived “low” ethnic and cultural sphere of the dhadi performers who provided entertainment (Nijhawan 2006:86). Before that time, however, it appears that dhadi music performers were confined to one or more hereditary performer communities. Dhadis have been called

a type of *Mirasi*, however, further research is required to understand what sense of “*Mirasi*” is to be understood in such an assignment. Some contemporary *dhadis*, for example Shareef Idu, do openly call themselves “*Mirasi*.”

### *Bharāī*

The *Bharāī* are a community who traditionally specialized in playing *dhol*. They are associated with worship of the 12<sup>th</sup> century saint, Sakhi Sarvar Sultan. Sakhi Sarvar (also known as “*Lakhdata Pir*”) is believed to be a giver of sons. The saint is also worshipped to protect animals and children from disease (Bhatti 2000:90). His worshippers in Punjab come from all classes and religions.

Sakhi Sarvar’s remote shrine at Nigaha (dist. Dera Ghazi Khan) is a site of annual pilgrimage for the saint’s *‘urs*. When Punjab had yet to be divided, pilgrims came all the way from the eastern side of the province—an epic journey on which pilgrims slept on the ground and did not wash their heads or clothes until it was complete (Rose 1919:568). Leading the worship of Sakhi Sarvar and serving pilgrims along the way were special devotees: the *Bharai*.

One legend related to Sakhi Sarvar offers an origin story for the *Bharai* as musicians. It is said that when Sarvar was being married, the *Mirasi lāgī* showed up late for the wedding. As a further slight, the *Mirasi* also rejected Sarvar’s modest offering of a piece of blue cloth. Thus spurned, Sarvar gave the cloth to a Jatt companion named Shaikh Budda, declaring that they did not need a *Mirasi*. He instructed Shaikh Budda to tie the cloth around his head as a badge of honor, and to play the *dhol* (Rose 1911:85). Another legend describes an episode that occurred after Sakhi Sarvar’s death. A merchant from Bukhara had visited the Nigaha shrine and Sakhi Sarvar appeared to him. The saint then ordered the merchant to bring from Bukhara a blind man, a leper, and a eunuch, in order to take care of his shrine. All three were “cured” by the saint, and they commemorated their healing by beating a drum. Sarvar is supposed to have appeared and said, “He who is my follower will ever beat the drum and remain *barahi*, ‘sound,’ nor will he ever lack anything” (ibid.).

It is important to mention that the *Bharai* are also called “*Shaikh*.” In the census of 1881, *Bharais* in the Lahore division were subsumed under “*Shekh*” (Ibbetson 1883:229). And in the 1901 census, the *Bharai* were *only* counted under the rubric of *Shaikh* (Baines 1912:91). Contemporary informants (June 2006) at village Dhaunkal (dist. Gujranwala) hardly recognized the word “*Bharai*,” instead referring to the *dhol*-players who come (from outside) to the village fair as “*Shaikh*.”

The customary duty of the Bharai was to lead the pilgrims on their journey to Nigaha. During the journeys they led the singing of songs and dancing in praise of Sakhi Sarvar. They also led devotees on shorter trips to local shrines or festivals, and begged for offerings on holy days. Whilst playing the dhol, a small troupe of Bharai entered a neighborhood or village. With them they carried a long bamboo pole, on which are tied colorful strips of cloth or veils. The cloths were given by women by way of giving thanks for boons granted, like the birth or marriage of a son (Rose 1911:86; Faruqi et. al. 1989:35).

When not leading pilgrims or the worship of Sakhi Sarvar, the Bharai had other duties. These would include the general role of village drummer, which was to play the dhol at the time of reaping the harvest, for *bhangrā* dance, and during wrestling matches. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Bharai were said to “often act as Mírásis” (Ibbetson 1883:229), in other words, they performed *lāgī* functions. They were circumcisers in the West, and it was said that in the South they were even more common as circumcisers than the Nai (barber, the typical circumciser elsewhere) (ibid.). A unique activity of the Bharai is the singing of “lullabies,” *lorī*, to children. Once or twice a year the Bharai of a village would go to the homes where a son was recently born to do so (N. Kaur 1999:29).

### *Valmīkī*

The so-called *Chuhṛā* people are found all throughout India where, along with the *Chamār*, they make up the majority of the population of what were historically the “untouchables.” Their hereditary and, ultimately, “defiling” occupations were sweeping and scavenging, often including the removal of dead animals and waste.

It is important to acknowledge from the outset the considerable issues surrounding the very naming of this group within the sensitive context of caste politics. At one time the outsider label “Chuhra” was considered appropriate for Hindu members of this caste. Concurrently in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, converts from among these people to Sikhism and Islam, largely to escape their status in the Hindu caste system, had started to become known as *Mazhbī* and *Musallī* respectively. In more recent years, “Chuhra,” although still widely used by outsiders, has become derogatory, such that use of the term *with abusive intent* can be a criminal offense (Judge 2003:2990). The Hindus of this ethnic community in Punjab now largely identify with the term *Balmīkī* or *Valmīkī*, after Valmik, their patron saint and the poet of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* (ca.5<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE). Within narrowly circumscribed, contemporary contexts we can and should call each community by its currently preferred names. However, although each group subscribes to a different label based on its religious affinities, all emerged from one

*ethnic* community. Indeed, even while maintaining separate religious identities, each Chuhra-based group has more in common with these analogous groups than with other communities; there *is* some binding identity that they share. One needs a label to discuss them collectively and regardless of religion. The politically correct term “Dalit” is practically useless for ethnography because it can refer to a member of any “downtrodden” Scheduled Caste. Therefore, within the present confines of discussing the group historically as an ethnic community I am regrettably compelled to use the expedient term, “Chuhra.” To avoid the dilemma altogether and not use the sensitive historical label, I believe, is a worse offense because doing so has the side effect of silencing discourse about these people. Already ignored or “invisible” in society, the people thus also become invisible in discussion when we avoid mentioning them. And, consequently, their role as musicians also goes unrecognized.

Many Chuhra, like members of most Scheduled Castes in Punjab, are employed as agricultural laborers and service workers. They are also, however, involved in a range of music activities, both in devotional and profane contexts. For instance, an account from a Hoshiarpur village in the 1920s tells that it was a Chuhra’s job to walk through the streets whilst beating a *daff* (frame drum) to announce coming events (Dharam 1996:55). A recent writer states that, “Practically, all the members of the marriage band parties are Balmikis” (Puri 2004:9), although this sounds suspiciously like a localized phenomenon.

In order to properly contextualize the musical activities of the Chuhra community they must not be thought of as merely a “caste.” Rather, the Chuhra constitute a rather distinct society, although probably more so in the past than now. They may have been an erstwhile “race,” like the Dom, who when incorporated into the larger society gravitated towards certain professions, but who, nonetheless, retained a distinct lifestyle, rituals, language, and deities. Their status as “outcastes,” living on the margins of village life and severely restricted in their interactions with other classes, would have maintained if not intensified the idiosyncrasies of their lifestyle.

One can see the Chuhra’s distinct, traditional music most distinctly in the worship of the saint Gugga, who is thought to be the ruler of all things beneath the earth. Gugga’s legend follows the pattern of many Indian mythological tales, but the raw presence of its local sites and details give it a powerful immediacy. The saint’s shrine lies in the middle of a desert near Rajasthan’s village Dadreva (dist. Hanumangarh). From the original grave, dirt has been taken by devotees and brought back to local communities to establish smaller *Guggā māṛīs* (the term for these shrines). These are extremely numerous in East Punjab, and they are typically taken care of by Chuhra. On Thursday evenings especially,

devotees who have paid their respects to Gugga sit with their brethren on the ground outside the inner sanctum. In a happy mood, devotees greet each other with *Jai ho!* (“Hallelujah”). At the start of sunset, one or more dholis begin to play. Devotees continue to arrive for about two hours, when concluding rituals are performed by the Valmiki priests. During the monsoon months, when snakes are most prevalent, the belief is that appeasement of Gugga protects one from them. Gugga also has the power to cure snakebites if one brings the victim to his shrine (Rose 1919:171). Others come to Gugga requesting the boon of a son. Although a diverse cross-section believes in Gugga’s powers, the Chuhra are especially linked to his worship and the maintenance of related traditions. Gugga’s dedicated devotees are known as *bhagat*. A bhagat may be of any caste, but most are Chuhras.

The bards of Gugga are generally musicians from the Valmiki community. Theirs is a unique repertoire of devotional hymns (*bhajan*) and legends from the life of the saint. The primary instruments used are the sarangi and a drum called *daurū*. The dauru is unique to this sphere of music making in Punjab. It is a small, hourglass-shaped drum with two heads, only one of which is beaten. While it resembles the Punjabi hourglass drum dhadd, the dauru is larger and beaten with a small stick. Its drumheads are larger in diameter than the length of its body, and its construction is less refined looking. Being an hourglass drum, its form generally resembles the famous rattle drum, *damrū*, which is one of the icons of Shiv. The iconic import of this is not lost on the devotees of Gugga. The dauru player cradles the drum in one hand while simultaneously squeezing and releasing a one-inch wide strap wrapped around the ropes that bind the drumheads. Doing this, he is able to achieve a variable tension on the drumhead and thus modulate its pitch when it is struck by the stick in his other hand. These changes in pitch are part and parcel of the identity of the rhythms played on the dauru.

The Chuhra bards are specially engaged to perform on Thursday nights and on the holidays during the festival season. Over the course of many nights they recite episodes from the tale of Gugga. The leader plays a drone-like, rhythmic accompaniment on his sarangi, with frequent, small flourishes. Bells are attached to his bow to create additional, light rhythm. He relates the episode in a patter speech. The spiel is frequently interrupted when a devotee takes his blessings and makes an offering, at which time the bard acknowledges the “maharaj” who made the offering. At regular points, the narrative stops while one or two other musicians, playing dauru, join in on the chorus of a hymn. They are accorded a special respect as well. Some bards are itinerant during the two-month Gugga season, traveling the circuit of fairs held in honor of the saint in Punjab, Rajasthan, and U.P.





Fig. 4. Bhagats from Punjab on pilgrimage to devotional sites of Gugga Pir in Rajasthan, 2004. They appear with a *ḍaurū*-playing bard. Photo: G. Schreffler.

Guggā Naumī, the Saint's birthday and annual festival, is celebrated on the ninth day of the native month Bhadon (Aug.-Sept.). On this day, fairs are held at Gugga *mārīs*. Preparations for the festivities begin about a month earlier, during which small groups of bhagats begin to periodically take out processions. The bhagats carry with them a long bamboo pole, *chhari*, which is the emblem (*nishān*) of Gugga. As with the Bharai's pole, on Gugga's *chhari* are tied cloths given by women. It is also topped with a broom of peacock feathers (*mor dī chhari*), and other characteristic decorations adorn its length. The procession of bhagats moves from alley to alley, door to door, seeking offerings. On the way, they sing songs in praise of Gugga, *sohlā* (sng.). Among the group are the players of *dauru*, beating time and signaling. Whereas *dauru* was the original instrument for this activity, and is still used, it is now very commonly replaced by the much louder *dhol*. I believe that with the absence of Muslim Bharais in the East Punjab since Partition, the worship of Gugga is following the pattern of Sakhi Sarvar.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in the past era it was the duty of the Bharai to lead women to the mela for Gugga at Chappar (Gurdit Singh 1960:205), but nowadays the Chuhra have clearly taken over this function.

Shaikh

In its original Arabic context, *shaykh* referred to a chief or elder. Imported into the Indian context, it retained this meaning, but also gained a use as a respectful title for those of Arab descent. However, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century the term had, in Rose's words, "degraded to vulgar use" (1914:399). Muslims of high "caste," of supposedly Arab descent, were known in Punjab by names like Sayyad, Qureshi, and Shaikh. At the same time, "native" clans of comfortable status, like the Jatt, were content with their tribal clan names. However, outcastes, especially when converting to Islam in hopes to improve their status, established new names for their communities. Hence, a Hindu Chuhra convert to Islam became known as "Musalli." This effort backfired to some extent as "Musalli" was understood by cynics as little more than a euphemism for "Chuhra"; in recent decades it has taken on its own overtones of derision (e.g. noted by Salim 2004:160). Still other individuals in society had found in Islam a real chance to soften the dividing lines of caste and class. Rose characterized the situation as follows:

[T]he class which lies between these two extremes [of bluebloods or landlords, and "outcastes"], ...neither so proud of their origin to wish, nor so degraded by their occupation as to be compelled, to retain their original caste name, very generally abandon that name on their conversion to Islām and adopt the title of Shaikh. (Rose 1914:399)

In some areas, Shaikh was adopted by a great number of artisan and similarly ranked castes. Even Mirasis (of some sort) identified with the term Shaikh. In 1931, the Mirasi in the United Provinces gave Shaikh to the census collectors as the new name for themselves (Ansari 1960:38). Neuman later recorded that the Mirasi in Delhi rarely called themselves Mirasi, instead they said their caste is Shaikh (1980:124). And more recent data shows that Mirasis in Chandigarh are also called Shaikh (Singh 1998:2300).

We have already seen that *Shaikh* is an alternate, if not the self-preferred, term for referring to a Bharai. However, there is yet another group of musicians that can be referred to as Shaikh. For the purposes of distinguishing a unique community of musicians that calls itself Shaikh, we must eliminate the aforementioned uses of the term that apply to Bharai and Mirasi. Having done that, we are left with the former outcastes, particularly the Musalli. As musicians, and as dholis in particular, members of this group have gone so far as to imbue "Shaikh"

with *one* of its earlier Arabic connotations: a leader in Sufi worship. They serve as facilitators towards reaching union with the Divine. The Shaikhs' image at least, if not their deeds, is of that of a faqir or *malang*, an ascetic who lives at the shrines of saints or wanders according to their "commands" (Ewing 1984:359) whilst living off of charity. Of course, the stereotype of the "wandering faqir" is only partly true. Shaikhs are often householders; their distinguishing traits as faqirs could be considered their unorthodox appearance and manner of devotion. Indeed, traditional Punjabi culture leaves two options for the vernacular musician-performer: Either come from a hereditary performing community, or live *outside* of the rules of society—as a faqir.

Musicians of this group appear to be largely a modern Pakistani phenomenon. Dhol-players of the Shaikh class style themselves *sāīn*—a respectful title for a faqir. In appearance they cultivate overgrown locks, don long robes, and adorn every finger with a ring. They perform at shrines as a matter of devotion to the saint. But whereas dholis everywhere in Punjab play at shrines, the "Sain" dholis' performances are motivated not only for offerings', but also for art's sake. Sain-type dholis usually perform in pairs, as one dholi must play the underlying rhythm while the other elaborates. Such an aesthetic show is not seen, say, among the Mirasis who play at Haider Shaikh's shrine in Malerkotla. Indeed, the Sains' playing is meant to be heard and *appreciated*. In the proper context, it is not without important ritual function, namely the inducement of trance, dance, and "ecstasy" (*mastī*). However, I would suggest that for a good percentage of the Sain-type dholis, religious devotion also provides an *excuse* to step outside their expected social role of non-musician service worker.

The most famous of the Sain dholis is Lahore's Zulfikar Ali, known best as "Pappu Sain." Having transferred a tabla-playing style to the dhol, he began playing regularly at the shrines of two of Lahore's saints, Madho Lal Hussain and Shah Jamal. As Wolf relates, in the late 1990s, students from the National College of Arts made it trendy to hang out and listen to Pappu Sain at the shrines (2006:253). Another dholi of the "Sain" model is Saghir Ali Khan of Jhelum. His ustad was a Mirasi from the Islamabad area. Saghir Ali and his brother have been the primary dholis engaged by Pakistan's National Council of Arts for national and international programs.



Fig. 5. Ustad Saghir Ali Khan playing the *chimṭā*, Jhelum, 2006. Photo: G. Schreffler.

#### *Mazhbī*

*Mazhbī* is the name adopted by the Chuhra community that converted to Sikhism. Although they are Sikhs, as a “low caste” group some music may be considered as within their purview to perform. I have noted a small number of them who play dhol, which they make use of to perform at shrines for offerings. Balbir Singh of Ladda village (dist. Sangrur), wanders to various shrines and festivals around Punjab, and as far as Kashmir, as did his teacher before him. His occupation? “*The work of God*” (personal communication, 14 April 2005).

#### *Bāzīgar*

The term *Bazīgar* is a layperson’s label referring to a few endogamous tribes sharing a similar cultural background and who were historically associated with giving acrobatic and physical stunt shows. Having been largely concentrated in the West Punjab before Partition, they filled the musician’s role in many contexts, especially in areas where other communities like Mirasi and Bharai were fewer in number. This Hindu community concentrated in East Punjab after Partition, where they have played a decisive role, in some cases, in maintaining and directing the flow of certain traditional performing arts. They are especially known nowadays as dhol-players and dance-trainers. However, like the Dum

and the Chuhra of the past, their people possess a comprehensive range of music that includes both services for others and amateur performance amongst themselves. The article in this volume on their community will describe their history, lifestyle, and musical activities in more detail.

#### *Other Performer Communities*

The preceding communities are those that have had long-standing traditions of professional musical performance. Naturally, this list cannot account for the social background of every musician in Punjab. However, the rule still holds true that not just “anyone” would or could perform professionally. We have seen that musicians usually come from low-status or marginal communities, and this includes a number of communities whose members have recently taken to performance even though they had no tradition previously. We can theorize that, in the case of individuals that do not come from the “main” performer communities (above), they may elect to perform because their social position “permits” it. In the least, they have “nothing to lose” and only to gain, in that music performance, especially on the currently in-demand instrument, dhol, is a viable means of survival. Some of the communities, less established but observed to have gotten involved in music of late, are noted here.

Chamār. The traditional leather-working community, well known as an historical “outcaste,” Chamars made great strides in income level and education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The famous Punjabi recorded singer Lal Chand “Yamla Jatt,” who ushered in a new style of folk-singing, was of this background. Ludhiana is a center. I have also noted Chamars as dhol-players and performers of the entertaining *nachār* dance.

Sānsī. The *Sānsī* are probably the largest group among the erstwhile itinerant tribes. The Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 stigmatized them as incorrigible thieves. However, though thievery was indeed practiced, their main means of sustenance was raising livestock, hunting, and selling domestic items (Bedi 1971:13). Interestingly, the Sansi have been the hereditary genealogists and bards (cf. Mirasis) to some Jatt clans of Punjab (Rose 1914:362). Musical activities of the Sansis have been connected with “begging.” In McCord’s unpublished ethnography of the Sansi, community elder Natha Singh recounted how the women used to sing and busk, especially for wedding parties. Some men formed a small musical band for busking, which consisted of such instruments as flute, cymbals, daff, and dhol. The band played at wedding and death ceremonies and Lohri celebrations, for the lay community (McCord 199x:4). Young Sansi men in the Chandigarh area, trained by Bazigar

artists, have recently taken up playing the dhol professionally. They supply this service along with their most prominent service in the area: providing mares for wedding processions.

Dakaunt. The *Dakaunt* are a group of Brahmans, designated a Backwards Caste, who migrated from West Punjab (Deep 2001). They are now especially dense in some villages surrounding Patiala and Rajpura. Members of this community are most visible nowadays as the solicitors who take collections that are purported to ward off the malevolent influence of the deity Shani Dev on Saturdays. Like the Sansi, they have begun to play dhol under the training of Bazigars.

Rae Sikh. The *Rae Sikh* are a Scheduled Caste of agriculturalists found along the east bank of the Ravi River. One of their subdivisions, whose members often cut their hair, is one of the dominant communities in the southern parts of Firozpur district and the border areas of Rajasthan. With the paucity of dhol-players in the region, and especially for their *jhummar* dance, many Rae Sikhs in the area have taken up the art.

#### **Discussion: In This Volume**

The articles in this volume begin with insight to the Amateur World of music-making with a contribution by Nahar Singh (Head, Dept of Punjabi, Panjab University). He is the scholar who has perhaps done the most systematic work on traditional Punjabi songs, and his ten-volume anthology of the songs of Malwa represents one of the most significant contributions to the study of Punjabi music. Unfortunately, Nahar Singh's work, begun in 1976 and first published in the 1980s, remains practically ignored by writers in English; I cannot recall having seen a single English author who has cited Nahar Singh, even when he or she makes reference to "Punjabi folk-song." This is illustrative of the fact that, in English discussions of Punjabi music, references to "folk-songs" are often vague and undifferentiated. Significantly, what is often called "folk-song" or *lokgīt* in popular discourse does not qualify as what Nahar Singh would include in that category. I was once discussing with Dr. Nahar Singh the texts of some songs popularized by Surinder Kaur, at which time he advised, "These are not *lokgīt*." From his perspective, "folk-song" includes those traditional songs that have been customarily associated with various rituals of the life cycle and those that were sung by amateur performers during the time before mass media. He acknowledges the exchange and stylistic similarity between some of the repertoire he calls *lokgīt* and that which he calls *prachalat gīt* ("popular song") (1985:30), however, the noncommercial and amateur sphere of the former can be appreciably recognized. Thus Nahar Singh makes an

important, historically informed and natively observed, distinction between categories of songs that is frequently missed, due to which, in my opinion, many a discussion that invokes “Punjabi folk-songs” lacks clarity.

The distinctions made by Nahar Singh speak to the placement of “folk-song” in what I have been calling the Amateur World. Still, I concede that the recognition of a category—perhaps even a historical *layer*—of songs such as those with which Nahar Singh deals is a separate issue from genre labels as they exist in the “real” world of discourse. Moreover, *repertoire* that can be identified as “folk-song” has been performed in other worlds of performance. In an effort to be diplomatic and yet to maintain the important emic distinction of Nahar Singh, I suggest the label *ravāitī gīt* or “traditional song” for this category. This emphasizes these songs’ assignment to ritual functions and the fact that they are rarely intended as “entertainment” outside of those contexts. (Compare this to, for example, Surinder Kaur’s songs, which are meant to entertain, anywhere, any time.)

Nahar Singh’s writing on “*Suhāg* and *Ghorīān*: Cultural Elucidation in a Female Voice” is representative of his style of discussing ritual songs. In addition to describing their cultural contexts and associated rituals, Nahar Singh analyzes their texts in effort to provide some insight to the structures of Punjabi culture. A similar approach has become common with other authors writing about Punjabi songs, and while this sort of textual reading is not the only approach, it remains an important one. In this case, because the majority of these songs are sung by women—indeed, because they are the main form of musical expression traditionally ascribed to women—one would be remiss to ignore their gender-based dimensions. In combination with his reading of Punjabi agrarian culture as a more or less oppressive system of patriarchal values, Nahar Singh’s description of these women’s songs has a feminist cast.

In the excerpt in this volume, Nahar Singh makes the point that although *suhāg* songs pertain to the bride’s rituals and *ghorīān* pertain to the groom’s, both are ultimately *voiced* by women. And while both genres would seem to function to reinforce the status quo (i.e. a patriarchal social structure) through the repeated images of ideal human subjects and relationships, because they are voiced by women (the oppressed subject), they also reveal a certain amount of the inner emotional world of these women. Thus he argues that in these songs Punjabi women “speak” on at least two different levels. At one level, they make expressions of blessing and joy towards their relations (particularly the males) while employing a socially sanctioned, “safe” tone. At another level, they express their predicament as relatively helpless subjects whose own desires are practically silenced by social norms. These songs, Nahar Singh suggests, were one of few outlets in

medieval Punjab for women to voice such expressions as the latter, even if they were subject to the discursive clichés of the former.

One of Nahar Singh's central theses is that "[T]he the cultural structures in which these songs rest are those well established by Punjab's agrarian society." While some might protest the strong Leftist bias in his tone of presentation, note that he does not advocate putting an end to the practice of these songs. He is clear that the "cultural suffocation" he talks about is a product of medieval times. He wishes us to consider these textual expressions of women in reference to that socio-historical frame. Indeed, the meaningfulness of these songs to current performers is unclear. Do they continue as a defense mechanism against holdovers of medieval thought in the current age? Or are they, perhaps, perpetuated for the sake of custom and ritual without too much attention paid to their content?

Taken with respect to the established frame of the feudal era, and assuming one accepts the method of textual analysis as productive, Nahar Singh's analysis of these song texts as reflecting the norms imposed by the culture of the agrarian community is reasonable. However, if that is the case, it might follow that these songs, while often discussed as if they were "Punjabi" by default, are not necessarily performed as such by *all* the communities that reside in Punjab. In other words, if Nahar Singh's thesis is correct, one would expect the content of wedding songs performed by non-agrarian communities to reflect *different* values. My firm belief is that Punjab is made up of appreciably different communities with different cultural viewpoints, among which the roughly circumscribed agrarian groups (Jatt, etc.) make up just one. Recognition of multiple Punjabi cultural systems is perhaps clouded by the facts that: 1. The agrarian system is indeed the socially dominant culture, even, some might say, a hegemonic one; and 2. Non-agrarian communities have aspired to the prestige of the agrarian and have been gradually changing their systems in imitation of them. I do not believe that the agrarian system is totally hegemonic—not in all spheres of life. Indeed, music is one cultural sphere where, in my observation, non-agrarian communities may feel little or no oppression from the agrarian communities. Nor does imitation necessarily indicate a hegemonic relationship.

Thus I propose two avenues of future research on Punjabi ritual songs, to engage Nahar Singh's ideas. The first is an investigation of the songs as current practice with an eye towards their present significance. What can qualitative research tell us about what they mean to the women who perform them today that one's own reading of the texts cannot? The second is a comparison with the texts of ritually analogous songs performed by non-agrarian communities. What sort of values do *they* reflect?



Also originating within the Amateur World, but again problematic with regards to the classificatory label of “folk-song,” are the short verse forms that are considered within the performance purview of all Punjabis. Preeminent among these forms are *bolīān*, *māhīā*, and *ḍholā*. Being generally unattached to ritual context and not coded as pieces specific to women, these forms are perhaps the most democratic of traditional music. Their performance contexts range from simple quotation to informal dance performance, from polished stage presentations to use in recorded “bhangra music.” Being so prevalent and ubiquitous, there are also some issues in distinguishing them formally and in discerning their historical and geographic roots. The article, “Western Punjabi Song Forms: *Māhīā* and *Ḍholā*,” addresses this deceptively complicated topic. Through reviewing the extant writings about these genres and critiquing them in relation to examples of their forms, I have intended to provide an exploratory critical presentation.

The *bolīān* genre, I suspect, may be the most familiar to the readership of this journal. This in part speaks to the basis of much of global (and familiar) Punjabi popular music in East Punjab. Along with this, while bolian was not much associated with the historical *bhangrā* dance, the new, folkloric staged dance presentations that subsequently replaced the definition of “bhangra” had been strongly based in Malwa, the heartland of bolian. Thus bolian, being actually native to *giddhā* dance, went on to be included in a still newer definition of “bhangra”—as popular music—where, ironically, it serves as a stylistic marker of the genre and its perceived relationship to the old dance.

This is not to say that the other short verse forms are not also well known on both sides of Punjab. After Partition, it is difficult to assign any geographical center to *māhīā* and *ḍholā*, however they are generally thought to have originated in western Punjabi areas. In recent years, these forms have been especially well heard in popular songs that evoke the *jhummar* dance. This does not necessarily mean that people can recognize the forms, however. For that reason, I have focused on these arguably less familiar Western Punjabi genres. Along those lines, I have indulged in also presenting quite a different Western Punjabi form called *ḍholā*, which has a different cultural valence from the short verse forms. Indeed, in contrast to the others, it is said to have been the “high” art expression of people in the *bār* regions. Unfortunately, and despite some excellent foundational literature in Punjabi from the 1940s-50s, this dhola of the bars is poorly known today. Such an important form of expression to a segment of the Punjabi population bears the research of scholars of Punjabi music and literature, and I hope this English overview creates awareness that might provoke further investigation.

For the most part, the performers in the Amateur World required no special description, gender being the main operable variable. When

coming to performances in the Professional World, however, other aspects of the performer's social position—his or her trade, class, or ethnic community affiliations—come to the fore. The identity and lifestyle of musicians is an under-referenced and under-studied aspect of Punjabi music.

As seen from the above discussion, when one approaches the question of who are the professional musicians of Punjab, one is confronted with a myriad of irksome labels. Some are generic; others are incidental. Most come from outsiders, and some come from insiders—if we are so lucky to hear them. Due to the generally low social status of musicians, there exist many confusing euphemisms, too. Musicians both accept and reject these labels, depending on incidental needs and discursive context. In some contexts it does not hurt to be mistaken for someone else; musicians are primarily professionals in need of employment. To explain who one is to an outsider can be complicated, and it is often simpler to tell someone what *they* want to hear. In other contexts, musicians may resent the implication that they would be associated with another group. All of this confusion of what refers to whom is then mapped onto the varying dimensions of time and place, leaving us with a confusing picture indeed. Rather than designate labels in terms like insider/outsider, it becomes more helpful to view them as a matter of positioning.

The complicated notions associated with “Mirasi” are the focus of Lowell Lybarger’s article “Hereditary Musician Groups of Pakistani Punjab.” Dr. Lybarger had to come to terms with this label when conducting his ethnography of Pakistani Punjabi tabla-players and other professional art musicians (Lybarger 2003). As such his contribution is an immensely helpful critical review of prior literature about Mirasis and similar hereditary musician groups. In it Lybarger begins with the observation that, “Non-musicians and the few non-hereditary musicians in Pakistan use the pejorative term *mīrāsī* to refer to all hereditary musicians.” However, in critiquing the way the term has been used since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, he concludes that, “The common belief that all hereditary musicians are Mirasis indicates considerable ignorance of the subtleties and complexities of musician society as a whole, and suggests the rubric may not be particularly useful from an analytical perspective.”

Lybarger takes a dialogical approach, making the sources “talk” to each other and then letting the musicians talk for themselves. Each voice brings a different perspective along such scales as time, geography, and insider/outsider. Thus the colonial ethnographer Rose (1914) brought a broad and abstract (census-derived) picture. Though full of sundry detail, it lacked cultural nuance, especially in accepting “Mirasi” as a widely valid term. Pakistani culture officer Nayyar (2000) brought a more intimate familiarity with the musicians, but his view was also somewhat

constrained by the jumbled landscape of post-Partition West Punjab. Ethnomusicologist Neuman's (1980) study, in Delhi, was similarly limited in geographic perspective, for which reason he was forced to extrapolate. The ethnography of McClintock (1991) was deliberately narrow in approach in order to contribute fine detail, by which Lybarger is able to conclude that the musicians called *Mirasis* among whom he himself did fieldwork in urban Lahore were a different group. Thus Lybarger negotiates the issue whereby "*Mirasi*" is used both generically as an occupational term for most hereditary musicians of West Punjab while at the same time it is ascribed to or claimed by one or more specific ethnic communities.

My interpretation differs just slightly from Lybarger's in that whereas he implies that we might identify some group of people native to the label of *Mirasi*, I believe that as an outsider's label it is something of a moot issue of to whom it applies. I concede, however, that there may have been one community that was dominant in the make-up of individuals first called *Mirasi* by outsiders, creating a tenuous occupational-ethnic link that subsequently became less meaningful with more liberal uses of the term. The term says more about the intent of the user than about any set of people to whom it is claimed to refer. Lybarger found for the West Punjab area that *Mirasi* is pejorative term, and illustrates how it could be used to deride others or distinguish oneself negatively. There are some contexts, too, where individuals embrace it for the clout it affords. In my experience, performers in the East Punjab spoke with pride about being "*Mirasi*," as their numbers are few and this marks them positively as knowledgeable musicians. However, Lybarger's informants were faced with negative stereotypes of what being labeled *Mirasi* meant. This then is an excellent example of the differences in Punjabi music-culture on each side of the border.

Lybarger's work points to the fact that, with "*Mirasi*" relating to such a significant group (historically and numerically), we desperately need more research on these performers with which to flesh out the picture. More site-specific ethnographies of *Mirasi* groups, like Lybarger's and McClintock's, and my brief exposition above, are necessary as we continue to piece things together.

At this point we move on to the study of some specific professional genres of performance. The *dhāḍī* and the *ṭumbā-algozā* performers represent two distinct genres of ballad-singing that entailed major forms of staged performance in the pre-Partition era. Incredibly, little of substance has been written about these—genres very central to the notion of "Punjabi folk music"—before Hardial Thuhi. His local familiarity with the people who both perform and enjoy these genres makes for an invaluable source, and therefore, two of his writings have been included here.

The first contribution by Thuhi deals with “The Folk Dhadi Genre.” Dhadi performers have been the subject of some prior writings focused on that contingent of them which presents Sikh historical and devotional material.<sup>7</sup> Thuhi represents the first writer to focus on the performers who present instead the genre of traditional (secular) ballads, *qissās*. These performers seem to have almost disappeared from the cultural consciousness, remembered only by the eldest generation. Thuhi uses the term “folk dhadis” to distinguish them from the equally sticky term “Sikh dhadis,” the latter referring to the singers at gurdwaras who are quite visible in contemporary East Punjab and who arguably now occupy the default position in people’s imaginations when one uses the term “dhadi.”

Thuhi makes no grandiose claims about the lineage of these performers, and he is careful not to give the idea that the qissa-performers are necessarily connected to the eulogizers of the Sikh Guru era or to any other performers of earlier times called “dhadi.” He begins the history of the dhadi art “as we know it” with those performers patronized by Guru Hargobind (early 17<sup>th</sup> century). However, he notes what would be a decline in patronage of dhadis by the Gurus by the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thuhi conservatively reasons that the dhadi genre was subsequently revitalized with the boom in popularity of qissas in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which material the dhadis adapted. It is unclear, however, if there was much continuity between the performers of the earlier dhadi forms and this qissa-based form. It may have been a different sphere of individuals that *adopted* the genre for the purpose of entertaining the common folk. We must be careful not to assume, when reading history, that the term “dhadi” appearing at various points implies any such continuity of performers and genre, even as contemporary performers are happy to connect themselves to a name in the past in order to add the appearance of historical depth to their tradition. With these issues in mind, critical historical research on dhadis prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century would be welcome, as from the side of a textualist working especially with Persian manuscripts.

In surveying the performers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Thuhi finds that they have come from a variety of caste and religious backgrounds. If there was a shift, whereby the performers of an earlier era were all Mirasis (or at least, Muslims), and after which other ethnicities entered the fray, Thuhi does not speculate. The only thing relatively certain about the history of the genre is what could be gleaned from recordings and from older artists’ stories about their teachers. The center of this tradition, Thuhi explains, was the Malwa region. His description mentions two known long-standing lineages of disciples. The first, based in the Sangrur-Bathinda area, was that of Modan Singh of Loha Khera. The second, based in the Ludhiana-Faridkot area, can be traced back as far as

Parmeshri Ram, whose inheritor was Kaanshi Ram Dohlon—born ca.1866. Neither progenitor appears to have any affiliation with the *Mirasis*, and yet, if one looks at the entire body of performers, it seems that a slight majority were—especially in Malwa. This is interesting, considering the clout carried by the Malwa region, from which the dhadis' *kalī* verse form is also claimed to have originated. More curiously, Thuhi notes a breakdown in the demographics of which dhadis were recorded on disc when the genre was popular. He says that all of those individuals recorded had been from Doaba, while those not recorded (but nonetheless well known) had been from Malwa. He reasons to explain this that Doabis were more urbane, while the Malwai dhadis remained attached to the customs of their hereditary traditions, even superstitiously. However, when we look in his collection at the roster of dhadis who did and did not record, we can also see that the former are basically all Sikh whereas the latter are largely Muslim.

The second contribution of Thuhi to this volume is about “The Tumba-Algoza Ballad Tradition,” which, despite noted similarities in performance contexts and methods, is established as a distinct genre from the balladry sung with *dhadd-sārangī*. For the novice, indeed, the easiest way to recognize these genres is by their instrumentation. (A third genre that inhabits a similar cultural world is *kavishrī*, whose performers can be recognized by their *lack* of any instruments.) Despite the re-contextualized use, in recent decades, of the *tumbā* (or the similar, yet smaller and always one-stringed *tumbī*) and *algozā* as generic “folk instruments” capable of evoking “Punjabi music,” in their time they were mainly confined to ballad-singers. Interestingly, one can also recognize these different types of performers more or less by their grooming. Dhadi performers mostly wear beards, often neatly trimmed. The tumba-algoza ballad-singers, by contrast, are most often shaved at the chin, but wear neat mustaches.

This last detail, while fairly trivial, probably correlates with the fact that the great majority of the tumba-algoza singers are Muslim (the high number of Sikhs involved in dhadi music would have influenced the wearing of beards). However, while there was a consistent block of Muslim dhadis who were *Mirasis*, this does not seem to have necessarily been the case with the tumba-algoza singers. The latter performers came from a variety of communities (including a Muslim Jatt example). More ethnographic research is needed to understand just who might have come to adopt this profession, as it is one whose origins appear to be quite undocumented and, as Thuhi points out, there have been no prior writings of substance about the genre. Thuhi is only able to place some performers at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and to conjecture that there must have been a prior established tradition from which they sprang. Who were these people who adopted this practice—that of going into the

fields at harvest time to sing and be rewarded with a share of the crop? Whoever they were, their tradition seems to have been somewhat more “open” than the practices customarily assigned to those reigning hereditary professionals, the *Mirasis*.

This last idea speaks to the nature of their repertoire in which, we can observe from the texts, a number of verse-refrain compositions are included. These compositions more closely resemble contemporary “song” than do the multi-episodic, strophic ballads. Such material was better suited to the short, recorded format. In these performers, more so than with *dhadis*, I think, one sees the potential for the birth of a *popular* music style in Punjab.

Overall, by including the biographical details of specific artists, Thuhi gives these genres a “face” and brings the performers to the fore. We realize that notions like “the *dhadi* tradition” are abstract constructs and if we treat them too rigidly we will never reconcile the many referential meanings of terms like “*dhadi*.” These “traditions” were not abstract genres of the Punjabi past, but rather have consisted of the specific deeds of a finite set of individuals.

Thuhi’s work on the ballad-singers is also important both for telling us what their repertoire specifically is/was and who wrote it. Mention of these ballad-singers elsewhere typically only would include the information that they perform “stories such as...” with examples named of only the best-known *qissas*. Here by contrast we get a sense of which *qissas* are most common, including some tales that are rarely mentioned otherwise. And by telling us who wrote these compositions, Thuhi thwarts the vague notion of “folk-songs” that are anonymously attributed to “the Punjabi folk.” Remember that this was a professional art, and singing a ballad like these was something very different than singing a simple verse like a *māhīā*. Such ballads require extensive training to perform, in accord with the fact that they are extensive *compositions*. Unlike ballads in the English-language tradition, so many of which were indeed professionally written compositions (e.g. broadsides), but which were adopted by and changed considerably in oral tradition, the Punjabi ballads were less suited to adoption by amateurs.

From the information given by Thuhi we can establish a list of the common compositions and composers of Punjabi balladry. Chief among the composers, their compositions being shared between both the *dhadi* and *tumba-algoza* genres, were Karam Singh Tuse and Hazura Singh. The *dhadi* repertoire included (but was not limited to) the following tales, which I have culled from Thuhi’s books:

1. *Hir* - by Bansi Lal of Nauhra, Ganga Singh Bhoondar, Divan Singh of Shahina, Hazura Singh Butahrivala, Ran Singh, Babu Razab Ali, Maaghi Singh Gill, Didar Singh Ratainda, Niranjan Singh, Amar Singh Shaunki, Naazar Singh
2. *Sohni*
3. *Sassi* - by Natha Singh of Nararu, Ude Singh
4. *Mirza* - by Pilu, Dogar of Chhapar, Amar Singh Shaunki
5. *Dulla Bhatti*
6. *Jaimal-Fatta*
7. *Dahood Badshah*
8. *Dhol-Sammi* - by Ali Shah of Ghudani-Ghaloti
9. *Sucha Soorma*
10. *Puran Bhagat* - by Karam Singh Tuse
11. *Gopi Chand*
12. *Kaulan Bhagatni* - by Bishan Chugawan
13. *Raja Rasalu* - by Puran Chand of Bharo
14. *Indar-Bego Nar* - by Dila Ram of Matharu Bhoodan
15. *Kaka-Partapi*
16. *Jaikur Bishan Singh*

The tumba-algoza repertoire included the following tales:

1. *Hir* – by Muhammad Raunt, Hazura Singh Butahrivala, Hashmat Shah Arewala
2. *Sohni*
3. *Sassi* – by Hashmat Shah
4. *Mirza*
5. *Dulla Bhatti*
6. *Jaimal-Fatta*
7. *Dahood Badshah* – by Mahi
8. *Dhol-Sammi* – by Hashmat Shah
9. *Sucha Soorma*
10. *Puran Bhagat* – by Muhammad Raunt, Karam Singh Tusa
11. *Gopi Chand*
12. *Kaulan Bhagatni* – by Karam Singh Tusa, Bishna of Chugawan
13. *Layla*
14. *Shiri-Farihad*
15. *Saiful Malook*
16. *Malki-Keema* – by Muhammad Raunt
17. *Jiuna Maur* – by Muhammad Raunt
18. *Raja Harish Chandra*
19. *Shah Bahiram* – by Hashmat Shah

From the items arranged at the end of each list one can see the more or less unique tales found in the repertoires of each genre. In addition to these titles, in these two articles we also get details of the compositions' forms, their style and of which particular ones have been popular. Many texts examples appear in Thuhi's books, and I have included a few here, which I have endeavored to translate.

Most originally, Thuhi gives us an idea of the prominence of this music in people's lives, especially in the form of recordings and as the early material for the Punjabi music industry. One can read it as a source for how that industry began to function in Punjab, starting with the first democratizing aspect: the public's shared enjoyment of music via sound reinforcement technology. Though expensive phonograph discs were out of the reach of the average consumer, nonetheless they gained access to this music. In the process, the public created a demand that in turn gave a new sort of economic support for performers. Looked at from another perspective, these commercial products—records—amounted to an inadvertent form of preservation of the traditions. And where schemes of "cultural promotion" are doomed to eventually fail, this tangible preservation can be seen as a true treasure of Punjabi musical documentation.

With the next article by Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry, "The Naqqals of Chandigarh: Transforming Gender on the Musical Stage," we move onto quite another group of traditional performers. It is an intimate picture of performers known as Naqqals. They are less defined by a single genre of music performance; their performance activities are many. This kind of group coheres, first and foremost through their familial relationships. Chowdhry's Naqqals are recent performers in East Punjab. Ethnically speaking, they come from the Bazigar community. We see how they get on as an adaptive community, independent of any prior classifications by others. In fact, the written classifications of Naqqals, such as in Rose's early 20<sup>th</sup> century work, are quite unhelpful in knowing *these* Naqqals.

The present article has been shaped from Dr. Chowdhry's 2009 dissertation from Panjab University, which reflects upon the making of regional Indian theatre tradition in dialogue with her own experience working with Naqqals in many productions. In this way, the aspect of female impersonation becomes the focus of interest where it probably would not have in a typical survey study of Naqqals. Indeed, this is one of the first discussions of that aspect of Punjabi performance.

The article points the way for future research on transgender related topics in Punjabi music. Some of the comparable, yet to be researched performing genres of Punjabi music are the *nachār* dance performers and the *khusrās*. *Nachār* is an exhibitional dance featured as entertainment at village weddings. Its striking presentational style includes one or more



female impersonators (*nachār*) and bagpipe (*bīn bājā*) players. Gurdit Singh noted the presence of female impersonator dancers at melas in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (1960:201), but this appears to have been merely incidental fun. The current nachar dance genre proper, inclusive of the added spectacle of bagpipes and military side drums, is supposed to date just to the mid-1970s (Kang 2005:40). According to Kang, the bagpipe performance tradition was kept especially by Mirasi families from Sialkot, as well as some from the Julaha and Chand Jhiur communities (*ibid.*). The performance paradigm consists of the nachars and pipers dancing together while going about rapidly in a circle, or else in a free-form fashion. The nachars tease the audience and perform typically female-gendered dance actions. However, these actions extend beyond the usual reservations of how women should dance in mixed company, suggesting an unlikely fantasy scenario of *uninhibited* women's dance. The success of the genre hinges upon this impossible scenario that it presents, combined with the utter hilarity and spectacle of what the performers might do. At the 2004 Lok Sangit Mela in Patiala, for example, a nachar group included the spectacle of boiling a cup of tea over a live flame created atop the head of one nachar, all whilst dancing. In contrast to most other dances performed for the stage, which so often exhibit stale petrifications of once vibrant practices, the newer nachar dance is robust and unwilling to be bound by the stage. The controversial nature of the dance means that, unlike other dances such as bhangra, jhummar, and giddha, nachar has yet to be co-opted by universities and culture promoters.

Equally upsetting to the social order—deliberately so—are the khusras, who are members of a community of individuals sharing an identity inclusive of transsexuals, eunuchs, and transvestites. Unlike the nachars, their challenging gender identities adhere beyond the performance stage. The challenge they present is nonetheless “contained” in that they are accepted in assigned roles as providers of a “customary” riotous spectacle that marks joyous occasions. The flip side to this is that, one could argue, their role is prescribed. Musical performance—so often the provenance of the marginal—becomes one of the few viable options for them as a group of “others.”

Chowdhry problematizes the dynamics of one performing another gender on stage in Punjab. “The female impersonator is not supposed to be a verisimilitude of women but is supposed to *signify* a woman. The actor neither plays a woman nor copies her but only signifies her as an idea, with all the exaggerations that are imagined about an idealized woman.” The act as a cultural gesture is not necessarily “liberating”—a concept that might be associated with transgender acts in the West—but rather a symptom of patriarchy. Still, at the same time, within the constraints of its own world and for individual performers it may yet

have liberating aspects. The individual perspectives of Naqqal performers suggest that the mainstream society's reactions to their performances are quite a separate issue from what they may feel when they transform their gender in this circumscribed context.

The Bazigar offer quite an opposite case from the well-known Mirasi in that their name is not ubiquitous. And yet as musicians today in East Punjab they *are* ubiquitous. They are frequently dismissed—both by laypersons who think Mirasis are the only musicians, and by Mirasis, who view themselves as the proprietary purveyors of music. However, in the post-Partition era—the time that has shaped much of Punjabi music as we now know it—Bazigars have been at the forefront of cultivating and spreading musical practices.

In an effort to get deeply into the ethnographic description of a community represented by Punjabi professional musicians, I present the article, “The Bazigar (Goar) People and Their Performing Arts.” Bazigars perform for others and, as a unique and discreet community, have their own amateur music, too. Thus the musical performers are not merely a “service class” that caters to “mainstream” Punjabis, but rather people with performing traditions, some of which they offer to others as a means of earning. Perhaps most importantly, their lifestyle has not remained static. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century especially their community underwent some dramatic changes. One cannot rely on the old colonial works or equally outdated popular notions when trying to get to know these Punjabi communities, who are so often “heard but not seen.”

Last, but not least, this issue offers an article on a Punjabi performance tradition within the Sacred World. Central to devotional practice within the Sikh faith is the performance of *shabad kīrtan*. The practice is distributed over a range of musical styles and performance contexts, yet these are unified by the purpose of singing the Sikh scripture (i.e. *gurbānī*, the body of poetic compositions of the Gurus and other devotional poets included in the sacred texts). From the inception of the faith, Guru Nanak prescribed the repetition of the divine “Name” (*nām*) as a means of spiritual embodiment. *Shabad kīrtan*, roughly translated as “hymn-singing,” facilitates that aspect of Sikh practice by causing one to experience the Name through the sonic manifestation of the Word, *shabad*.

The Sikh scriptural text *Guru Granth Sahib* is famously organized according to *rāg*—the local melodic system of mode-complexes. However, as Dr. Inderjit N. Kaur explains in her contribution, “Sikh *Shabad Kīrtan* and *Gurmat Sangīt*: What’s in the Name?,” the exact reason for this and the basis on which compositions were set within *particular* *rāg* categories are unclear. *Rāgs* were part of a larger aesthetic paradigm that encompassed art and poetry, too, as the notion of *rāg* or “color” was tied up with particularly ascribed moods, sentiments, and

semiotic indices. It was common practice in the era of the Sikh Gurus, not unique to them, to sing one's poetry. In the absence of any common system of musical notation, naming the particular mode-complex (*rāg*) would serve to give some indication of how a piece was sung. The Gurus' poetry is also not unique in being organized by *rāg*. Shah Abdul Latif's (1690-1752) collected work, *Shāh jo Risālo*, for example, was also organized as such (Baloch 1973). One might suspect, therefore, that the *rāg* categories were mainly a rhetorical organizing convention of poetry, a suggested guideline for singing, or an artifact of the memorization strategies of singers. However, the Guru Granth contains a considerable amount of additional information about how the text should be performed. Kaur includes among this the information available from the titles of compositions and from the compositions themselves. It includes explicit or implicit indications of mode, musical style, melody, meter, and sentimental atmosphere. Kaur is particularly fascinated by one explicit indication, *ghar*, which she interprets as designating versions of particular *rāgs*.

All of these "musical" features suggest the idea of "Sikh music" or devotional music based on Sikh principles. The translation of such a concept gave birth to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century notion of *gurmat sangit*, a term in use largely in educational contexts and among some scholars. The phrase is problematic because, as Kaur reveals, the term *sangit* ("music") occurs rarely in Sikh scripture and it clearly does not apply to the main practice of shabad kirtan. In seeking to show what is in a name, Kaur helps us to understand that the notion of music brings with it differing opinions on how and what one should perform. Thus one finds different opinions among performers as to whether music or only the text is important, and how to articulate each according to interpretations of *gurmat*. These ideas bring us full circle to the elemental issue raised at the beginning of the present essay—that of what constitutes "music" in Punjabi culture.

\* \* \*

A final note on translations: I wish to thank the authors who kindly permitted me to translate their works from Punjabi. Within the translations I have supplied a few notes to contextualize or otherwise clarify information where possible. However, I have not engaged in "fact checking." The works stand as a record of what was published at the time, and one should be mindful that they do not necessarily represent the most current information or opinions of their authors. Thanks also go to Gurinder Singh Mann for his advice on some inscrutable phrases in the traditional song texts. I bear the full responsibility for any

misunderstandings in translating these works and I offer my apologies in advance for any mistakes I may have made.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I use the word “performance” here to refer to a broad category that allows for the fact that not everything contained within it is necessarily “music” from the native cultural perspective. However, because my discussion is itself situated within a Western cultural discourse, I also reserve the right to use “music” throughout in a broad sense that includes any kind of sound-based performance.

<sup>2</sup> Much Punjabi verse is recited while singing, as a matter of course. A poet, in presenting his or her work, may sing it. However, a performance of “music” would not necessarily be considered to have taken place.

<sup>3</sup> This reference, by the grammarian Patanjali, was to *svapacha* (Ghurye 1969:311). A later grammarian, Hemachandra (11<sup>th</sup> century) called Dumba (Dom) the vernacular word for the *svapacha* (ibid.:313).

<sup>4</sup> The difference in nomenclature may be explained by the fact that the textual source that Gardizi uses for this information, Abu ‘Abdallah Jayhani, is believed to be in turn partly derivative of a report from circa 800 C.E. (Minorsky 1964:203), which may well have been in Arabic.

<sup>5</sup> The verse reads, *bhalā rabāb vajāindā majlas mardānā mīrāsī* (“The good player of rabab in gatherings, the Mirasi, Mardana”) (Bhai Gurdas, Var 11, pg.13).

<sup>6</sup> This idea arose out of a conversation with Dr. Harvinder S. Bhatti (9 Nov. 2004) and I think partial credit goes to him.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of these are Bhaura’s *Panjāb de Dhādī* (1991), which contains biographical sketches of Sikh dhadis, and Nijhawan’s *Dhadi Darbar* (2006), which is a case study, following the example of 20<sup>th</sup> century Sikh dhadis, in the way a performative genre can become related to political and religious agendas.

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